

MINUTES OF COMCAST PUBLIC HEARING
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2020

The first of two public hearings on Comcast was held on Saturday, November 21, 2020.

Chairman Sullivan announced that, in accordance with Gov. Baker's Order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 20, the meeting is held via Zoom. It is televised and recorded and available on Facebook live.

Board members in attendance: Justin Sullivan, Chris Zorra, David Andrade, Adam Petronio.

Town Administrator Shawn E. Cadime and Town Counsel William Hewig III were in attendance.

Asst. Town Administrator/Director of Human Resources Carol Ann Days monitored Zoom.

A motion was made by Mr. Petronio, seconded by Mr. Andrade, and it was unanimously

VOTED: To open the Public Hearing at 11:01 a.m.

The vote: Mr. Petronio – Aye; Mr. Andrade – Aye; Mr. Zorra – Aye; Chairman Sullivan.

Chairman Sullivan said there are certain items the Board can discuss: funding grants to support public education and Cable TV, construction of lines and upgrade to studio, limited tech upgrades, local consumer service office, senior citizen discounts, license compliance and enforcement and length of contract.

He said this is not an exclusive contract. Other providers have been solicited but the response is that it is too costly to come into Seekonk.

The rates are outside the scope of authority for the Board of Selectmen. The Town is eligible to receive 5% or \$280,000 to help fund TV9 or public access television and \$17,500 to assist in capital improvements and toward schools for their own public access TV.

The senior citizens discount is 10% of basic services, which equals \$2 a month. It is not negotiable.

Sandra Coble said she called Comcast at least ten times. She found out it is the same price for cable or internet.

Mr. Andrade said it seems like they are not doing that correctly.

Chairman Sullivan advised they are sending out a new fee schedule in terms of internet service. It is not under the control of the Board of Selectmen. Rates are controlled by the state.

Ms. Coble said in other towns, where there is competition, people don't pay these rates. It is a monopoly.

Mr. Andrade said it is not a monopoly. Other companies do not want to come into town.

Mr. Clark thought there was a meeting two or three years ago where Verizon wanted to come into town and it was shot down.

Mr. Cadime said that is not true. There has been discussion with Verizon to come in but they turned it down because of cost and they felt they would not get enough customers.

Mr. Andrade said there was never a Board of Selectmen or Town Meeting to reject any proposal because it never happened.

Mr. Zorra noted the Town Administrator reached out to Verizon last year but they didn't want to spend the money.

Mr. Paul Myles Mathias of Ledge Road suggested Cox Cable. They are in nearby East Providence.

Mr. Cadime explained the Town is not in the business of soliciting cable companies to come into Seekonk. It is an open market. Not sure whether there would be costs because they are in Rhode Island.

Atty. Hewig said it costs so much money to construct and put up wires. If a cable company cannot make 55% to 60% of the market they won't make a profit. Comcast got here first.

He felt Verizon wants to get out of cable business. They want to put all their money in internet. Verizon has telephone lines but not poles.

Mr. Mathias asked why businesses and schools are working from home. He asked about municipally-owned broadband or high speed wi fi services. The town could set the rates. He would rather pay the town.

Atty. Hewig said four or five towns in Massachusetts have their own municipal company.

Mr. Cadime said that would require equipment and personnel.

Mr. Andrade said the town would have to rent the poles.

Mr. Mathias said progress does not come without cost.

Mr. Andrade said a company such as Verizon would be able to do it better than a municipality. He asked if Mr. Mathias would be willing to pay about \$150 or \$170 to the town.

Mr. Petronio said cable might be obsolete in five years.

Mr. Cadime noted the federal government is changing language with regard to licenses. Internet services will probably be taken off the table.

A motion was made by Mr. Andrade, seconded by Mr. Petronio, and it was unanimously

VOTED: To close the public hearing at 11:26 a.m.

The vote: Mr. Andrade – Aye; Mr. Petronio – Aye; Mr. Zorra – Aye; Chairman Sullivan – Aye.

The second public hearing will be held virtually on Monday, November 23, 2020 at 7 p.m.

A motion was made by Mr. Andrade, seconded by Mr. Petronio, and it was unanimously

VOTED: To adjourn at 11:27 p.m.

The vote: Mr. Andrade – Aye; Mr. Petronio – Aye; Mr. Zorra – Aye; Chairman Sullivan – Aye.

Respectfully submitted,

David Viera, Clerk

Prepared by:

Patricia Gamer, Secretary